No. 84

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"The only thing he told me was just before he went away," she faltered. "He spoke of some wrong he had done, without giving me a full explanation."
R. of M. G., No. 84.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

ALICE'S indomitable spirit rose in hot rebellion. She would not allow herself to become the prey of this man whom she had hoped never to see again. How dared he steal into the confidence of her own beloved husband and enter her house under the assumed name of Earl Cortland?

And yet, in spite of everything else, she knew that she must meet him, that she would be compelled to bow to his wish whatever it may be.

There was only one way to silence him, and that was to remove him forever from her path.

The very thought of it made her shudder, and yet it was the only way to free herself from this horrible yoke.

It was a few minutes past ten when she left the Ames mansion, heavily veiled, and boarded a Franklin Street car.

This brought her down to Front Street. She alighted quickly and made her way to the Market Street ferry.

Her heart beat frantically as she entered the spacious waiting room.

It was partly filled with passengers who wished to be transferred over to the New Jersey side of the beautiful Delaware.

The hands of the clock pointed to five minutes of eleven. The man she had come to meet had not yet arrived.

With a quick nervous step she walked up and down the waiting room, unmindful of the eager glances that tried to penetrate her heavy veil.

At last the clock struck eleven.

She looked about swiftly. A wild hope took root in her heart.

Perhaps he was not coming. Perhaps he met with

an accident which prevented him from keeping his appointment with her.

An accident! The very word was music to her ears.

She would have been the happiest woman in all the world, if she knew that her cruel nemesis rested at the bottom of the river.

She watched every door with eager eyes. It was now five minutes past eleven and still he did not appear. Alice decided to wait ten more minutes.

When at last she rose with a sigh of intense relief and tried to make her way through the dense throng of people, she heard someone pronounce her name.

It struck her like an electric shock, and for a moment her heart stopped beating.

"I am glad you were patient enough to wait," Cortland said coming close to her. "I would have been more punctual, but an accident occurred on upper Market Street, and the car was stalled for almost twenty minutes."

Alice was silent. Cortland looked at her closely. It seemed that he was still somewhat in doubt that the lady he had addressed was really Alice.

"Will you follow me, fair lady?" he said with mock courtesy.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked.

"To Camden. We will be perfectly safe there."

"I absolutely refuse to accompany you across the river," Alice replied with decision. "You must state your errand with me right here, and I must urge you to be brief."

"By jove," he ejaculated, "my lady has grown high and mighty. Her tone is authoritative. Fortunately I am holding the reins at this particular moment, and it would be wise for you to come with me without further

objection."

"Listen to me, George Ballard," Alice said in a quivering voice. "It is utterly impossible for me to follow you to Camden. I am expected home to dinner at two. I am willing to meet you half way, but you must be reasonable."

The man led the way to a vacant seat in one corner of the waiting room.

Here they could talk unreservedly, for the constant buzz of the throng of people would spoil the effort of the inadvertent listener.

"Now tell me," Alice began after they were seated, "why did you follow me to America?"

He looked at her for a long while before he answered her question.

"That is about the most foolish question you can ask," he told her at length. "You don't think for a minute that I was going to let you go free after the dirty deal you gave me, do you? That I am still alive is no fault of yours, Alice. You meant to murder me, and almost succeeded."

There was nothing she could say in defense of herself Every word the man uttered was true.

"Well, I suppose my days had not yet been numbered when you pushed me off that cliff," he went on. "I thought sure I was a goner when I struck the water. When I came to I was lying in the bottom of a fishing boat with an old chap fanning me.

"Say," he added, his voice rising with sudden anger, "were you ever so wrought up that you felt like screaming at the top of your voice?

"I was when I realized that you tried to murder me, an old loyal friend of yours, Alice. I was almost insane. When they took me to the hospital I kept on screaming like a wild Indian I suppose my mind had

been affected by that terrible fall.

"For two weeks I lay in that hospital. I must have told a good many things in my delirium, for the police were called and they insisted upon knowing all of the details.

"But they knew too much already. The following day I was shown a newspaper which contained not only an accurate description of the near tragedy, but also the name of one Alice Procter, an American and the would-be murderess.

"Of course, they did not arrest you because you had left for the States with the Ames family. As soon as I was strong enough, I returned to America.

"I had little trouble in locating you, Alice. Charles Ames, the banker, is known all over the country. His only son, a good sport and race horse owner, is equally well-known.

"You surely had your nerve when you made a play for that boy. And you got away with it. You have more nerve than any other woman I have ever met, and I'll admit I met a few in my days.

"You are now Mrs. Robert Ames, rich and influential. I waited purposely until you had attained that goal before I came to square accounts with you. And now, damn you!" he ended viciously. "You are going to pay. Do you hear? You are going to pay!"

She looked at him from behind her veil with her eyes filled with deadly hatred.

It was some moments before she found her voice again.

"I presume that you propose to blackmail me now that I am at your mercy," she panted.

"Why call it blackmail," Alice?" he replied with a smile. "That is rather an ugly word. No doubt the millionaire banker, Robert Ames, would pay a good price

to keep certain stories about his wife from the ears of the public.

"It might make splendid reading for the American people who love sensational reading. Perhaps the Italian courts would have been les credulous, if the cliffs of the Amalfi mountains had been able to talk."

"Hush, George Ballard," she quailed. "Someone will hear you."

"I am not George Ballard any longer, any more than you are Alice Procter. I am now Earl Cortland—gentleman and clubman. Since we are bound to meet quite frequently in the future, it might be well for you to remember that name."

Alice was trembling from head to foot. She leaned helplessly against the back of her seat.

"You are a devil, Earl Cortland," she hissed. "You have laid your plan well, but suppose I should refuse to have further dealings with you and inform my husband that you are an impostor?"

"Your husband might find it convenient to consult a divorce lawyer if the papers of this city reprinted certain paragraphs of an Italian newspaper.

"You will remember that thanks to my influence the matter was suppressed, and not a single American correspondent got the real truth.

"I have a copy of the 'Figaro' in my pocket. Perhaps you would like to read it. I think the story it contains would look very well in English."

"Since your object is purely blackmail, I suppose I must ask your price," Alice panted. "I will inform you, however, that my account of ready cash is limited. I only keep a few thousand dollars in the bank, and the rest of my fortune is tied up in securities."

"Of course, you do not expect me to believe you, Alice. A woman who is capable of murder is capable of

falsehood, also," he answered. "I really do not care a continental how your money is tied up. You are possessed of sufficient ingenuity to find a way out of most any difficulty.

"I am in urgent need of five thousand dolars at once. You must bring them to me in two days. I do not expect to meet you at the ferry again, but will give you the address of a friend in Camden. You will meet me there."

Alice shook her head emphatically.

"Yes, you will," he continued. He moved a trifle closer and whispered a few words into her ear.

Alice sat like a statue. She did not offer any more objections. She was beaten and completely in the power of this man.

"I suppose it is time for you to go. Robert Ames might miss his beautiful wife," he said mockingly

Earl Cortland rose to go, while Alice seemed still undecided.

Neither of them was aware that the eyes of someone were constantly upon them, and that the eager ears of this person had listened to every word of their secret conversation.

When Alice was about to rise from her seat, a restraining hand was laid upon her arm.

She uttered a little cry when she saw the face of Larry Coleman before her.

"What brought you here?" she gasped.

"Nothing in particular," the young man replied. "I have an off-day and I was just loafing about the wharf when I saw you enter the waiting room."

"But how did you recognize me? My face was hidden behind this veil."

"I would know you anywhere by your magnificent figure and queenly carriage."

"And no doubt you have been spying upon me?" she asked.

"I saw you the moment you came into this room. I noticed your extreme nervousness, and also that you expected someone. When that man came I was about to leave, but something in his face made me hesitate for a moment.

"His ugly sneer and your trembling figure told me that he was no friend of yours, and I decided to watch. I am at your service, Mrs. Ames. If this man intends to harm you in any way, or you want me at any time, you may count on me."

"I thank you indeed, Larry," she said sweetly. "If I am in need of a trustworthy friend, I shall send for you. Go quickly now. He must not see us together or he may cause me trouble."

Earl Cortland had walked slowly toward the door thinking that Alice was following him.

When he turned at last he saw that she was just leaving her seat. His offer to accompany her a part of the way, she declined with thanks. She wanted to be alone and think.

He took his leave with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You will not forget our next meeting," were his parting words.

Alice walked on swiftly until she reached a Girard Avenue car. She did not look back once. Her mind was in a turmoil. She must find a way to escape from the clutches of this man.

"Oh, why didn't he drown in the lake when I shoved him off that cliff?" she muttered to herself. "He is the only man who can harm me. He is the only connecting link between the present and my past. With him out of the way I would have nothing to fear. But—oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

The ride homeward on the slow-moving streetcar was torturous. Several times they were held up in the congested district.

Across from her sat several men, whose leering eyes were fastened on her shapely ankles. With a motion of disgust she attempted to pull down her short skirt. The men grinned.

Finally she got up and changed her seat. But here, too, she was the cynosure of admiring eyes—of coldly speculating eyes. She felt relieved when the car finally reached the street where she decided to get off and walk.

Chapter 278

ALICE'S DILEMMA

THE CLOCK had just struck two when Alice arrived at the Ames mansion. She immediately sought the seclusion of her room, where she could hide her agitation from everyone. It would have been a different task to describe her frame of mind as she tore up and down her boudoir like a caged tigress.

She had been beaten and baffled at every point by the man who held her and her future in the palm of his hand.

She was in a frightful dilemma, without any hope of extricating herself.

She was incapable of framing a clear thought, much less to form a plan by which she might escape from the snare.

There was not one person in all the world upon whom she could rely. Arthur Vernon had served her, but she felt that she dared not confide too much in him.

He was a man whose dealing and treachery hardly invited confidence.

She knew him to be a man who would betray his best friend for personal gain. The secret of her past would be unsafe in his keeping.

Suddenly a gleam of cunning shot across her face. Yes, there was one man who might serve her, and this man was Larry Coleman.

She had read him thoroughly that day she met him out in the forest when he came to her rescue.

It would be an easy matter for her to draw him on,

to intoxicate him with her own beauty and make him a willing slave.

Had he not promised to help her if she was in trouble?

The more she thought of this man, the more she became convinced that this was the only way out of her present difficulty.

When this crisis was once safely passed her future would be tranquil enough.

All the obstacles which had threatened her happiness, once removed, Robert Ames would be all her own, her very own.

But how was she to go about it? Larry Coleman was the assistant groundkeeper of the Ames estate on the Schuylkill river.

His duties kept him there most of the time, and it would be a dangerous proposition to open a correspondence with him.

What she had to say to him would surely arouse his suspicions and perhaps he might fail her at the crucial moment.

Had Coleman been employed in the stables of the Ames mansion it would have been easy to come in constant touch with him.

At last she hit upon a plan. Why not persuade her husband to move to the villa on the picturesque Schuylkill river?

His mother could take care of the Ames mansion on Broad Street. Alice felt confident that she would be able to win her husband over.

During the last few days he had been very kind to her.

Her every wish was granted and it seemed that Robert Ames began to consider Alice more seriously This was due to the fact, however, that his conscience

troubled him sorely.

Alice was possessed of the power of keen observation.

She read Robert Ames like an open book. It seemed that a load had been lifted from her troubled mind when at last she arrived at a definite plan.

She became more cheerful and sent for her maid.

"If Mr. Ames asks for me, please tell him I am indisposed," she said with a frown. "And I want my dinner served in my boudoir."

The maid nodded her pretty head and disappeared. Alice took a book and tried to become interested, but somehow she did not succeed.

Her mind was too full of the future and her plans.

When dinner was served a few moments later, she ate heartily.

Then she allowed her maid to comb her raven locks and retired at an early hour. She was badly in need of sleep and mental rest.

This was denied her, however. The moment she fell asleep her slmbers were disturbed by ghastly and horrible dreams. She found herself alone in the forest of the Ames estate.

Larry Coleman came to her rescue, but it seemed that before he reached her, the face of Earl Cortland came between them.

His face was distorted with rage and hatred. He turned upon Larry Coleman fiercely and dealt him a terrible blow.

She saw the young man fall to the ground. His red blood dyeing the white snow a beautiful crimson.

She screamed with horror.

The next instant Robert Ames came cantering

down the hill on his favorite horse.

She saw the sudden change in his face as he looked upon the scene with an expression of consternation.

"What is the meaning of this?" she heard him ask.

Then with a frightful oath Earl Cortland began to denounce her. She heard him tell every word concerning her miserable past. He called her a heartless fiend —a murderess.

She saw the face of her husband grow whiter every moment until at last it turned gray with horror.

She wanted to defend herself, but her tongue was cleaving to the roof of her mouth.

Alice's heart turned sick as she saw the man whom she loved more than her own life turn away from her with an expression of loathing on his face.

She wept bitter tears in her dream.

Again she found herself walking through the streets of Venice on the arm of George Ballard.

A moment later they were viewing the surround-mountains.

His hoarse cry as he lost the last desperate hold on the jagged rocks again rang in her ears.

She saw his ashen face and the despairing look in his eyes, Then she closed her own to shut out the horrible vision.

Then she heard the distant splash as his body struck the water below.

She rose from her kneeling position, and found herself on a small platform.

A sudden faintness overcame her, and before she could regain her balance she had lost her footing and she fell headlong over the precipice.

Alice awoke with a terrible scream.

She sat up in bed and looked about with wild eyes.

Her maid knocked at the door and wanted to know what had happened.

"I was only dreaming," she replied with a sigh of relief. Then the clock struck twelve.

Alice rose and turned on the light. There was no more sleep for her that night. She tried to read and at last fell asleep in her comfortable chair.

She was awakened by the entrance of her maid, who came forward holding a letter in her hand.

"This came by special delivery," she announced promptly.

Alice took the letter with a yawn. But the instant she saw the handwriting on the envelope she became keenly alive.

She ripped the envelope open, jerked out the folded sheet of paper, and began to read.

For the moment she forgot that the maid was standing there watching her covertly.

"You can go," Alice ordered gruffly. "I'll ring when I want you."

The maid left the room somewhat crestfallen and disappointed.

Once more alone, Alice returned to reading the letter, which ran as follows:

"My dear Alice:

There are a few things I failed to mention when we met yesterday. The most important of them all is the warning I must give you. If you value your liberty, don't make an attempt to resort to trickery.

I happen to know what you are capable of,

and I am prepared to checkmate any move you may make against me.

The next important matter I meant to mention is really a bit of good news for you. The woman you tried to kill with poisoned candy in Miami, Florida, did not die.

I received this positive information from our mutual friend, Frank Lorimer.

Another bit of news which ought to be welcome to you, is this. Philip Gordon had his marriage to you annulled. So you are neither a murderess nor a bigamist.

Try to get what comfort you can out of these facts. I am stating them in this letter merely as a friend who is always ready to help you.

However, don't get the idea that you can snap your fingers at me now. There is still a warrant out for your arrest in Miami for attempted murder.

It only requires a tip to the police in Philadelphia to land you in a prison cell.

Fortunate for you, Alice, I am the only one who knows that the former Mrs. Philip Gordon is now Mrs. Robert Ames. And you can depend upon me to keep silent, providing you play fair with me from this day on.

As I told you, I must have five thousand dollars at once. It is up to you to get that money for me.

This is really a trifling sum for the wife of a multimillionaire banker.

I was always under the impression that you were one of the most resourceful women in the world.

You always got what you were after. Go after

that five thousand without delay.

With kindest regards:

Earl Cortland.

For several minutes Alice sat immovable with the letter still in her hand. Finally a sigh of relief slipped over her lips.

Her heart had suddenly grown lighter. The most dangerous factor which lay in her path was removed now.

As much as she hated Philip Gordon's first wife, Alice felt glad that she had not succumbed to that poisoned candy.

But presently she was plunged back into another rut of apprehension. So long as George Ballard, or Earl Cortland—as he called himself—was alive, there was danger. She vowed fiercely that she would not do his bidding.

It was easy enough for Alice to keep her mind from dwelling upon certain incidents of the past. So far as she was concerned, Oak Manor and all who dwelled there, had ceased to exist. She was living in a new world.

She was now a real wife and she loved her handsome young husband with a new devotion of which she had not thought herself capable.

"You better be careful, George Ballard!" she hissed, slowly tearing his letter into bits. "Don't drive me too far. If you think that I am at your mercy, you have another guess coming!"

Although she made a determined effort to put on

a cheerful front, the fear which constantly gnawed at her heart, could not be removed.

She rang for her maid and dressed.

Chapter 279

THE UNSUSPECTING HUSBAND

WHEN ALICE appeared at the breakfast table, her unusual pallor evoked the sympathy of her husband. He took it for granted that she was ill and advised her to send for Dr. Fielding without delay.

"I feel much better, Robert," she said, forcing a smile. "I had a very bad night, however. But you seem troubled about something. What has happened?"

Robert Ames did not speak at once. His eyes seemed to avoid hers for some reason.

Alice's heart sank.

The most frightful suspicions rose in her breast. Could it be possible that Cortland had betrayed her?

"Come, tell me, dear," she said coaxingly. "What has happened?"

"For some unaccountable reason the young assistant groundkeeper, Larry Coleman, assaulted Mr. Cortland last night as he emerged from the club." Robert frowned. "I am told that this young scamp would have killed Cortand if the police had not interfered."

Alice was dumb with horror.

She scarcely saw that her husband regarded her with a peculiar look in his eyes.

At last she roused herself sufficiently to face him, and met his questioning gaze boldly.

"I cannot understand why this young Coleman should wish to harm Mr. Cortland," she faltered. "Did you speak with him since the encounter?"

"No. I was still in the club, when it occurred.

When I arrived on the sidewalk Coleman was being dragged into a patrol wagon and Cortland was in the hands of friends.

"They carried him back into the club and sent for a physician. I am afraid he was pretty badly hurt. But what puzzles me, however, is that he positively refuses to prosecute Coleman.

"His trial will come up in the police court this morning, and Cortland has commissioned me to get Larry out, as he will not appear to testify against him at all."

Alice sat there staring at her husband with wide open eyes.

Her mind was in a panic, and absolutely incapable of framing a clear definite thought.

She was anxious to see Cortland, but she was more anxious to see Larry Coleman.

So he had instituted himself as her champion. This news thrilled her to some extent. If she were only sure that her name had not been mentioned in the trouble of the night before.

"Do you suppose the judge will allow Larry Coleman to go free in case Cortland fails to appear as the prosecuting witness?" she asked after a pause.

"He cannot do anything else," Robert returned. "besides, Cortland has written a letter which he wants me to present to his honor. Coleman will go scotfree, though he hardly deserves it, the rascal."

Alice smiled with satisfaction. Her curiosity was not yet appeased.

"Will you retain him in your service, Robert, or are you going to discharge him?" she asked again.

"I would not like to discharge him," Robert replied with some hesitation. "He is a splendid young fellow, trustworthy and capable. He came well recom-

mended, and I hardly think that his controversy with Cortland should affect me.

"He might have had some good reason for wanting to thrash Coleman. I will call him on the carpet, however, and will make an effort to learn the reason."

Alice remained thoughtful for some minutes. Her previous agitation had worn off entirely and she appeared to be her former self.

She smiled serenely at her husband.

"I presume you are scarcely in the humor of listening to a favor which I would like to ask," she began.

"I am always ready to listen to anything you might wish to say, Alice," he told her. "Your favor is already granted if it lies within my power to do so at this time."

Her eyes looked into his with an expression of mute gratitude. She rose impulsively and put her arms about her neck.

"You are the best and dearest of men," she cooed, pressing a long passionate kiss upon his lips. "But I will not accept this favor until you have heard the request."

Robert Ames allowed her to caress him with a tolerant smile. He was but human.

It was not an easy matter to hold this wonderful creature at arms' length constantly. Her charms were simply irresistible at times.

At this particular moment she was at her best.

The odor of her delicate perfume and the compelling flash of her black eyes, as they gazed into his, held him in check.

"Now come to the point, Alice," he said at last, disengaging himself from her embrace. "What can I do for you?"

"I should love to live in the pretty villa on

Schuylkill river drive, Robert," she said in a low, quivering voice. "Your mother could remain here if she so desired.

"You know, I have taken several trips along the picturesque river and I am completely charmed with its surroundings. Now what do you say?"

"Why, that could be arranged without the least difficulty," he replied. "I presume mother would like to remain here for the winter. We might take some of the servants and make the change whenever you are ready to go."

"I shall be ready at any time, Robert."

"Very well, Alice. I will speak to mother about it. I am sure she will not offer any objections. She often said that young married folks ought to be alone, and now is the time to follow that advice."

Robert rose to go. His car was waiting for him at the door.

"I will make a hurried trip to the villa and give the necessary orders some time to-day," he said before leaving. "You might talk the matter over with mother, Alice. Perhaps we could make the change the first part of next week."

Robert Ames gave the chauffeur orders to drive straight to the City Hall. Larry Coleman's case would be called some time in the forenoon.

He had scarcely entered the police court when it was opened with the usual formalities.

Luckily Coleman's case was the first case on the docket. He was led before the bar, and the chief clerk vainly cried for Earl Cortand as the prosecuting witness.

Finally Robert Ames rose, and walking into the enclosure, handed the judge the letter written by Earl Cortland.

The case was instantly dismissed.

Larry Coleman thanked his master with tears in his eyes. They entered the waiting automobile and made a fast drive to the villa.

Robert Ames made every effort to learn the cause of the assault, but Coleman would only say that Cortland had insulted him grossly.

Coleman re-entered upon his duties after his master had warned him to refrain from again attacking Cortland.

The Ames villa was in charge of a faithful old servant of the family, who occupied a small dwelling in the grounds which had been erected for that purpose.

Groundkeeper Allen had been in the employ of the Ames family for over twenty-five years.

He had been a favorite of old Charles Ames. He came to the Ames household when still a young man, as coachman.

His faithfulness was rewarded when Charles Ames built a neat little cottage on the spacious grounds near the villa.

This cottage was turned over to Allen when he married one of the maids of old Mrs. Ames.

When Charles Ames acquired the mansion on Broad Street, Allen was left to take care of the beautiful summer home on the Schuylkill river.

This he did conscientiously with the assistance of

his industrious young wife.

Their union was blessed with a daughter Cora.

She was a constant source of pleasure to her parents and aided them in many ways in the discharge of their duties.

Cora grew up to be a lovely young woman, and she took complete charge of the household when her mother died.

It was she who opened the door when Robert Ames knocked.

"Well, Cora," he said laughingly, "you look prettier every time I see you. How is your father?"

"He is well, thank you," she replied with a very deep blush.

"Is he about?"

"Yes. Shall I call him?"

"If you please."

Cora ran from the room and in a few minutes returned leading a tall, gray-haired man by the hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Allen?" Robert Ames said, shaking his hand warmly.

"How do you do, Mr Ames? And what can I do for you?"

"Mrs. Ames and I would like to have the house here ready for occupation by next week. Do you suppose you could manage it by that time?"

"To be sure, Mr. Ames. Everything is ready now. We will give the house a thorough airing before you come, sir."

Robert talked a few minutes with Mr. Allen, then suddenly rose to go.

"By the way, Cora," he called back, "I hear there is going to be a wedding some time in the near future. They tell me Larry Coleman is mighty sweet on you."

Cora blushed to the roots of her blond hair, but

made no reply.

She watched Robert Ames climb into his car and start it.

Her gaze followed him until his car disappeared around the bend in the road.

The young millionaire was rapidly approaching the city, when suddenly he heard a cry of distress.

He stopped his car quickly and jumped out. He waited for a few moments.

There it was again. A cry for help.

With a few mighty strides he reached the bank of the river. As he gazed over its frozen surface he was horrified to see a young girl struggling in the water.

She had evidently broken through the ice, and her plight was a dangerous one. She clutched frantically at the jagged ice, but as soon as she secured a hold it broke and again she went under.

Robert saw her danger at once.

"Hold on and have courage, I am coming!" he called to the girl.

Her terrified eyes watched the powerful man as he made his way across the ice.

He had secured a long pole and as soon as he came within reach he told her to take a good hold.

After some careful maneuvering he succeeded in pulling her out. He wrapped her in his heavy coat and carried her to his automobile.

"What is your name, and where do you live, little girl?" he asked.

"My name is Bessie Stewart, and I live in that house yonder," she replied with her teeth chattering.

"I thank you very much for your trouble, but you must allow me to go now," she continued. "No, no, you must not drive me to the house. Papa must not know what has happened to me. I am not very wet, so please

let me run along."

"At least allow me to take off your skates," he said with a smile.

Without waiting for her answer, Robert stooped and loosened her skates. She watched him with a curious look in her eyes.

"Who are you?" she blurted out at last.

"My name is Ames — Robert Ames. I have the pleasure of knowing your father, Bessie."

"You—you will not tell him anything about this will you, Mr Ames," she pleaded.

Her large blue eyes filled with tears.

"Certainly not, Miss Bessie," he smiled back at her.

"You know," she prattled on, "papa has repeatedly warned me against going skating on the river. I just couldn't resist the temptation. I would never hear the end of this, if he found it out."

"Your secret is perfectly safe with me, Miss Bessie. Your papa will never hear a word about this from my lips. Now you better hurry home and change your clothing. You may catch your death."

She flashed him another grateful look and with a sweet smile she ran quickly up the sidewalk.

He saw her disappear behind the door of the Stewart mansion. Then he re-entered his automobile and was driven to the city.

He arrived just in time for luncheon. Alice seemed immensely pleased as he told her of his arrangements.

To her it was like the dawn of a new hope.

The clouds on the horizon of her future parted, and a ray of light became visible.

The pensive look in her lovely eyes changed to one of happiness, and her fast beating heart drove the color into her face.

She had the instinctive feeling that being in personal touch with the young assistant groundkeeper, Larry Coleman, would be of tremendous benefit to her. Already he and Earl Cortland were enemies. Another quarrel between these two men might end fatally—for Cortland, of course.

An unpleasant grin lingered on her face as she thought of the possibilities the immediate future held.

Chapter 280

FORSAKEN

EVERAL weeks had elapsed since Alice succeeded in persuading her husband to move into the villa on Schuylkill river drive. Her well laid plan was progressing beyond her fondest expectation and dream.

Larry Coleman was in her power completely. Her seductive smile and personal charm had made him a willing slave.

He was willing to fight and give his last drop of blood for this woman, who meant to use him only as a tool to further her own plans.

Alice seemed to care little that her coming to the villa on the river had wrought havoc with the happiness of at least two people.

The handsome young assistant groundkeeper was perhaps the most miserable of all.

He loved his beautiful mistress better than his own life, and she gave every reason to believe that this intense passion was reciprocated.

Since it became her duty to give orders to all the servants in the employ of her husband, during his frequent absence, she had had many a social meeting with Larry Coleman.

Never before was the game of the moth and the flame played with more deliberate deviltry by a human being than it was being played in this particular case and by these particular parties.

Larry Coleman was running into his own destruction with unseeing eyes.

The fatal beauty of Alice had blinded him completely.

In the modest little home of groundkeeper Allen, a broken-hearted young girl wept scalding tears of bitter disappointment.

It was Cora Allen.

The handsome young Larry Coleman had won the affections of this unhappy creature only to throw her aside when his infatuation for the wife of Robert Ames began to consume him.

Her father was seated at the table, eating his evening meal in silence and alone.

Cora had refused to touch food for several days. It seemed that her young life had been blighted by the recent turn of affairs.

Before the Ames' came to live at the villa she had been the happiest girl in all the world, because Larry Coleman had promised to make her his wife.

Suddenly he grew cold. Cora watched the change in him with growing terror in her trusting eyes.

She had seen her lover repeatedly alone with the mistress of the villa. Their whispered conversation led her to suspect the worst.

Larry loved her no longer. He had transferred his affections to the lovely wife of the owner of the beautiful estate.

She dared not raise her voice in protest. If she did her old father would lose the position he had held for almost thirty years.

The old man's heart bled for his unhappy child. His efforts to make her forget the man who was the cause of her misery proved a flat failure.

Cora could not forget. She loved Larry Coleman with all the strength of her innocent and trusting nature. Without him life was a blank.

"Oh, God, I wish I could help you, Cora," the old man said with a groan. "I have loved this boy and would gladly have welcomed him as my own son, but I am powerless to stop the wheels of fate.

"Larry is rushing headlong into his own destruction. I would save him, but it seems he is beyond all power of reasoning."

"There is only one way out of this," he continued after a pause. "His deliberate neglect of duty will force me to discharge him. Perhaps his absence will help you to forget him."

"No, no, father," Cora replied with an appealing look in her eyes. "You must not do that. It would only drive him to do worst things; besides, it is some comfort to me to be allowed to see him sometimes — even at a distance."

Allen rose from the table with tears in his care-worn eyes.

He took his unhappy child in his arms and crooned over her as a loving mother would over an infant.

He happened to glance out of the window, and drew back with a start.

Larry Coleman was approaching the house.

"He—he is coming," he faltered.

"Who?" his daughter answered, looking up and drying her tears.

"He—Larry!"

Cora tore herself loose from her father's embrace and fled from the room.

A moment later Coleman entered. He looked about curiously as if he had expected to see someone who was not present.

The eyes of Allen were upon him with a pained expression.

Neither spoke a word for some minutes.

"Larry," the old man began, and his voice was soft and pleading, "what has come over you lately. You are not the same light-hearted boy you were when you first came here. Will you not confide in me? You know I want to be your friend and I had hoped to call you my son some day."

Coleman looked up surly.

He made several efforts to talk, but his voice just seemed to stick in his throat.

"Cora is very unhappy," Allen continued, coming a step closer. "I — I don't want to believe the ugly rumors which have been afloat for some time, Larry. You surely know better than to cast your eyes upon another man's wife."

"Who said that?" Coleman flashed back hotly. "I suppose you heard those rumors from some of the gossiping servants. At any rate I am not accountable to you for any of my actions."

The old man staggered back as if he had received a blow. This was far more than he had expected from the son of his old friend.

"I am sorry to hear you speak that way to me, Larry," he said with a sad smile. "You know I promised your father to watch over you, to keep you on the right path, no matter what happened.

"This matter has gone far enough. You have repaid my kindness to you by breaking the heart of my only child.

"You are standing on the verge of a precipice and it will be the hand of a woman which will cause you to plunge into the dark abyss.

"Come now, my boy. Will you not listen to reason? Cora's arms are open and waiting for you. Won't you go and say just one kind word to her?"

Larry Coleman did not know that in the next room

Cora Allen was lying upon her face, her slight frame shaking with heartbreaking sobs.

She had heard every word uttered by her aged father.

She also heard the unkind response which her lover made to the kind and well meant plea of her dear parent.

The last ray of hope was gradually disappearing from the horizon of her happiness.

She felt that Larry Coleman was lost to her, and it took all of her remaining strength to refrain from screaming out loud her terrible agony and anguish at her lost.

She heard his retreating footsteps. The last pathetic plea of her father had fallen upon deaf and sullen ears.

When the old ground-keeper entered the room a few minutes later, he found his daughter lying unconscious on the hard floor.

Chapter 281

THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION

ALICE stood in the center of her boudoir. The bronze lamp shed a pale green light over the room which was strangely soothing to her eyes. She was dressed in a low neck gown of pink silk, which showed her wonderful beauty to great advantage.

Continued in next number

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